

PENNSYLVANIA  
AGRICULTURE  
AND  
COUNTRY LIFE  
1840-1940

*By*

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On March 24, 1933, the General Assembly passed a chattel mortgage law which made it possible for a farmer to borrow from one of the several federal lending agencies and give as security a mortgage on his livestock, large pieces of farm equipment, or on any crop planted or to be planted within one year from the date of the execution of the mortgage.

Old Order Amish farmers seldom need loans from banks or government agencies. For generations they have avoided making investments outside their own church community and have loaned available money only to members of their church. Says Walter Kollmorgen, "[This practice] has served to give these people a rural credit system enjoyed by few farmers elsewhere . . . (1) no money is borrowed unless it is necessary, (2) . . . the interest rate is low, (3) there are no foreclosures, (4) bank failures and business failures do not disturb the community greatly, (5) investment sharks cannot plunder these people, and (6) the interest earnings remain in the community."<sup>56</sup> The Old Order Amish take care of their poor; none of them is on "relief." In recent years, however, they have not been able to be as self-sufficing financially as they once were and have had to deal with outside agencies to some extent.

### "BOOM AND BUST," 1840-1873

Between 1840 and 1860 Pennsylvania agriculture passed through a period of painful readjustment, from the old order of self-sufficing farming to the new order of commercial farming. Competition from the West, especially in wheat and livestock, changes in transportation, labor-saving machinery, and the rapidly increasing demand of Pennsylvania cities for locally-grown perishable food necessitated radical changes in farm management and in the farmer's point of view. Pennsylvania farmers began to see the wisdom in the counsel of Alexander Hamilton (December 5, 1791): "It is nevertheless a maxim, well established by experience, and generally acknowledged, where there has been sufficient experience, that the aggregate prosperity of manufactures and the aggregate prosperity of agriculture are intimately connected."<sup>57</sup> They began to produce mainly for local markets instead of for the export market.

From 1846 to 1848, while the Mexican War was in progress, and for a few years after, there was a brief period of fictitious prosperity. This was more than offset by the panic of 1857 to 1859, which was due chiefly to over-extended railroad building. The Bank of Philadelphia, the leading financial institution of the State, closed its door. Many State banks fell with it. Those that weathered the storm suspended specie payment. Corporations crashed, the fires of industry burned low, building operations ceased, and unemployment was wide-

spread. There was far less distress in rural districts than in cities, but many sales of farm products had to be made on a barter basis and land values declined sharply.

In 1842 Great Britain removed its prohibition of the importation of American cattle and in 1849 it abolished the duty on wheat. The Irish famine of 1846 stimulated export demand for wheat, and the widespread European famine of 1847 drove its export price up to \$1.25, from which it declined gradually until the Crimean War of 1854.

Between 1840 and 1855 the tide of emigration from Pennsylvania to the West, mainly to Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin, reached its height. Some of these adventurous pilgrims were discontented with their lot here, but many were successful farmers. Said one who remained behind, "Many of them are our very best farmers. . . . Lancaster, Berks and other of our best farmed and most densely populated counties, have furnished, and are still furnishing, a large proportion of these emigrants."<sup>58</sup> The hill counties had increasing numbers of abandoned farms. The gold rush to California in 1849 accelerated the westward movement. Said William H. Seward, "The world seems about evenly divided into two classes—those who are going to California in search of gold and those who are going to Washington in search of office."

In 1852 a Centre County farmer commented, "This tide of emigration [to the West] seems to flow mainly from the Eastern Counties. . . . Almost every one of our newspapers abounds in recommendations of the Western lands . . . while the merits of our own beautiful and productive valleys are wholly overlooked."<sup>59</sup> By 1860 western settlement had extended to Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri. Favorable land laws made it easy to secure a farm in the West with little means; it was a long and arduous task to hew a farm from the remaining virgin timber land of Pennsylvania, whereas prairie land required little effort to bring it under the plow.

The outbreak of the Civil War, in 1861, quickened the sluggish economic life of the nation into feverish activity. Agriculture prospered as never before. The greatly accelerated domestic demand for food was accompanied by increased European demand because of poor harvests there in 1860, 1861, and 1862. Farm mortgages contracted in gold were paid off with inflated paper currency. Country banks increased their circulation to two or three times their capital stock. The suspension of specie payment in 1861 made it unnecessary for banks to redeem their notes in coin. With his pockets stuffed with greenbacks the farmer was—he thought—in easy circumstances. Lured by war prices, many farmers expanded their acreage; land prices soared. Unskilled labor commanded \$2.00 to \$2.50 a day. Retail prices spiralled upward. Henry B. Plumb quotes these prices for the Wyoming Valley:<sup>60</sup>

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| October, 1863.....  | flour, bbl. \$8.50 |
|                     | butter, lb. .30    |
| November, 1865..... | flour, bbl. 13.00  |
|                     | butter, lb. .55    |
| May, 1867.....      | flour, bbl. 17.00  |
| March, 1869.....    | butter, lb. .52    |

The years from 1865 to 1873 were flush times. Men made haste to get rich quickly. They squandered money recklessly in speculative adventures. Instead of paying off their mortgage debts, many farmers invested their profits in stocks and bonds which, a few years later, were worthless. "It is probable," said Samuel C. Moon in 1896, "that at no time or place in the world's history has any community or its inhabitants enjoyed more of the comforts and social pleasures of civilized life than did the farmers of Philadelphia, Chester, Delaware, Bucks and Montgomery counties . . . during the middle half of the present century."<sup>61</sup> Other parts of the State, as well, bloomed under the genial warmth of this golden sun.

High tariffs on imports were an important factor in the effulgent period. After the Civil War the "infant industries" of the nation, particularly of Pennsylvania, clamored for high tariffs on manufactured goods "to keep out cheaper goods made by the pauper labor of Europe." Farmers were told that protection to industry would be an advantage to them, also, because the high wages that would be paid to workers in industry under the protective system would make it possible for these consumers to pay high prices for food. This argument sounded reasonable; so most Pennsylvania farmers joined manufacturers in political action. Soon, however, the infant industries became industrial giants; then farmers had to sell their produce in an unprotected, cheap world market and buy in a protected, expensive market. This disadvantage persisted for many years.

#### "HARD TIMES," 1873-1896

The panic of 1873-1879—one of the worst in the history of the nation—was the natural aftermath of the rampant inflation of the Civil War period. It was precipitated by over-expansion in agriculture, manufacturing, and railroad building, a plethora of inflated paper currency, and a multitude of speculative enterprises which yielded little or no return. On September 18, 1873, the great banking house of Jay Cook and Co. of Philadelphia closed its doors. This paralyzed the economic life of the State; soon the economy of the whole nation was demoralized. Commerce was prostrated, mills, factories, and furnaces were idle, property value shrank. Unemployment reached new heights; by 1878 the country swarmed with "tramps" and "hobos."

The depression hit most heavily farmers who had over-extended their operations during flush years; they were unable to secure credit



except from private capitalists who exacted exorbitant interest rates. This financial debacle had been building up for several years. In 1871 *Practical Farmer* of Philadelphia warned, "The large number of the best farms in Eastern Pennsylvania, advertised for sale in the public papers, evidence that causes are at work, lessening the profits of the farming business."<sup>62</sup> The innate courage and resourcefulness of the American people never were better exemplified than in the Centennial Exposition, which opened in what is now Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, on May 10, 1876. In spite of the prevailing economic distress it was a marked success; the industrial and mechanical exhibits were outstanding and the agricultural exhibits were of astonishing scope. The Exposition stimulated interest in more efficient farming, especially the use of labor-saving machinery.

Competition from the West continued to harass Pennsylvania farmers. During the decade 1870-1880, more than 297,000 square miles, an area equal to that of Great Britain and France combined, were added to the cultivated land of the United States.<sup>63</sup> In 1875 the General Assembly made an attempt to mitigate the damaging effect of the very low freight rates on western grain to eastern mills, but to no avail. Thousands of Pennsylvania farmers emigrated to the West, there to raise more grain and still further handicap producers in the old home State. Others moved to the cities. The census of 1890 revealed that two-thirds of the rural counties had declined in population during the decade.

Between 1880 and 1890 there was a furor over the number of abandoned farms. Most of these ought to have been abandoned anyhow because they could not be operated at a profit, being in an unfavorable location or lacking native fertility. Boys began to drift away from farms. There were numerous legislative inquiries, essays, and discussions on "how to keep the boys on the farm." Rural fathers and mothers entreated their sons in song:

"Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,  
Though profits come in rather slow.  
Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm;  
Don't be in a hurry to go."

But many went, and gave of their youth and energy to the building of the West and of the great cities. At meetings of the Grange and at other rural gatherings the subject discussed most commonly was, "Does Farming Pay?" Almost invariably the verdict was, "No."

During this trying period Pennsylvania farmers, especially those who lived near cities and towns, swung over more generally to the production of perishable commodities. In 1884 they were advised by H. E. Stockbridge of Massachusetts, a noted authority on agriculture, "It [is] absolutely impossible for the Pennsylvania farmer to hope to

successfully cope with his western rival [in the production of food staples]. . . . To the West belongs the growth of corn and wheat by the inalienable right of location and natural advantage. . . . We should devote our energies more exclusively to the production of perishable articles . . . , of which class fruit and milk are the chief representatives."<sup>64</sup> Pennsylvania farmers heeded this counsel, in principle, but continued to grow corn in abundance to feed dairy cattle and considerable wheat as a cash and nurse crop.

During this protracted depression many farmers went bankrupt. According to F. P. Weaver of Dauphin County, "In the valley where the writer happened to be born, it was said, in the late nineties, that one-fourth of all the farmers had gone through bankruptcy in the decade preceding. . . . Many of those same farmers, after losing all their earnings, continued to farm and accumulated a fair competence in the next twenty years when prices were tending upward."<sup>65</sup> Even the best farms did not yield an average annual return of three per cent between 1880 and 1890.<sup>66</sup> In 1886 the condition of farmers in Lawrence County was reported to be "worse than at any time since the war; and that there are \$300,000 of mortgages and \$150,000 of judgments against the farmers of that county."<sup>67</sup>

During the early nineties the gloom thickened. In 1890 the State Board of Agriculture was informed, "On all sides we behold the depreciation of farm property, a sure test of the unprofitableness of agricultural industry. . . . Between 1870 and 1880 [the loss to farmers in the market value of their farms] amounted to \$68,000,000 and there is no question but that the census of 1890 will show a still heavier shrinkage. From every quarter of the state and especially from the oldest settled and richest agricultural counties comes the same doleful tale. Berks County reports more sheriff's sales of farm property than in any three previous years. . . . Hence when forced to a sale, and the sales are few now which are not forced, it not unfrequently happens that a judgment which when laid was estimated fairly for one-half the value of the farm, now, with interest and costs, takes the whole and leaves the farmer stripped clean. . . . No longer is it with the farmer a matter of getting rich or even making money; it has narrowed down to a struggle for a bare subsistence."<sup>68</sup>

Though their discouragement was great, Pennsylvania farmers did not participate to any extent in the agrarian revolt of the seventies and eighties which centered in the Mississippi Valley. This was partly because their farming was more diversified and hence more nearly self-sufficing, but mainly because they were more conservative. Pennsylvania farmers were not represented in "Coxey's Army," which marched on Washington to impress upon Congress the grievances of the working classes.

Even during the darkest years of the depression, most Pennsylvania farmers made a living and a few made a modest profit. In 1887 a Crawford County farmer stated, "Pennsylvania has hundreds of farms, stocked with animals and farm implements, which would not bring in market three thousand dollars, the interest on which, at present ruling rates for property well secured, would not bring more than two hundred dollars. Now, what kind of living would an annuity of two hundred dollars give even a small family? And yet on a capital of three thousand dollars . . . whole families obtain good livings, keep the principal secure, educate the children, [and] ride to church."<sup>69</sup> In 1890 the Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture reported, "Notwithstanding this depression we find in every community farmers who are quietly making money."<sup>70</sup> In 1891 a Dauphin County farmer asserted, "The patient is not nearly so sick as they would have us believe. . . . Our sheriff the other day assured me that he has not during the past two years . . . sold out a single farmer who attended strictly to his business. . . . That as a rule, the failure resulted from neglect of the farm, either from dabbling in politics, speculation, from endorsement [of notes] or from whiskey. . . . On our waste land we can grow enough persimmons to effectually stop the mouths of all croakers."<sup>71</sup>

After 1892 the situation began to improve. The financial panic of 1893-1897 did not materially check the upward trend in agriculture. It did cause a general lack of confidence in banking institutions and all types of commercial paper; this had the effect of bringing farm land into greater demand as an investment. The number of auctions is a reliable barometer of conditions in farming. In 1896 the State Department of Agriculture reported, "There are less farms offered for sale than for years past, and . . . if a farm is in the market, it will soon command a purchaser at a figure considerably in excess of that which the same property would have brought a year or two ago."<sup>72</sup> By that time most of the public domain in the West had been taken; there being no more free land, Pennsylvania farmers began to realize an increment in the value of their holdings. The economic pendulum had begun to swing back.

### WORLD WAR I "PROSPERITY," 1897-1920

The years from 1897 to 1914 were relatively prosperous for agriculture. Production was fairly well balanced with demand. The Spanish-American War, which began in April, 1898, was of too brief duration to have much inflationary effect. In 1899 John Hamilton, State Secretary of Agriculture, calculated that the average net income per farm that year was \$991.29 and that the necessary money outlay for a family of five was \$623.30, leaving a surplus of \$368 which could be used to pay debts or invested.<sup>73</sup> The following year he added, "The

year 1900 has been one of prosperity for the farmers of Pennsylvania. . . . [In farmers' bank accounts, there has been] an increase of 44½ percent. since 1895."<sup>74</sup> In 1904, good Cumberland Valley farms yielded five per cent on the assessed valuation which generally was near, often up to, the full public sale value.<sup>75</sup> Between 1900 and 1910 the average value of a Pennsylvania farm and its equipment increased from \$4,690 to \$5,715. A large proportion of this increment was in livestock and machinery. By 1908 the swing to agriculture was quite evident. In 1914 it was felt by many economists that reaction was imminent, but the beginning of World War I restored the upward trend.

Between 1910 and 1920 the universal theme for discussion among urban consumers was "the high cost of living." Usually the finger of accusation was pointed at the farmer. "The indolence and cupidity of the farmer is the main reason for the high cost of living," pontificated a Philadelphia newspaper. The metropolitan press waxed hot about the situation and urged the government to make searching investigation into the affairs of "profiteering farmers." Between 1913 and 1917 urban consumers organized meat, egg, and milk boycotts. At that time strictly fresh eggs were retailing for thirty-nine cents a dozen. In 1913 the State government called a conference on the high cost of living; this pinned most of the blame on farmers.

By 1917 the pinch on salaried consumers was sharp. Milk retailed for fifteen cents a quart, butter for fifty-five cents a pound, and eggs for fifty-five cents a dozen. The slogan of the hour was "Back to the land"; this was proclaimed from the platform, preached from the pulpit, and set forth enticingly in city newspapers. Comparatively few urban back-to-the-landers made an economic success of their venture.

Active participation of the United States in the epic struggle "to make the world safe for democracy" began on April 4, 1917, but the war had been in progress since August 1, 1914. During these three neutral years the war had a definitely inflationary effect on American agriculture, particularly on the price of wheat and meat, which were in greatly increased demand abroad. When a state of war was declared, President Woodrow Wilson called on farmers to make an unprecedented effort to produce more food, not only for ourselves and for our armies but also for a large part of the nations with which we had made common cause. At rural gatherings the most popular song, next to the national anthem, was "The Farmer Feeds Them All." A widely heralded slogan was, "Food will win the war."

Pennsylvania farmers were under heavy pressure, as a patriotic duty, to change their long-established system of farming so as to produce more wheat. Howard Heinz of Pittsburgh was appointed Federal Food Administrator for the State by Herbert Hoover, National Food Administrator. The General Assembly created the State Council of



Defense to cooperate with the State Department of Agriculture and other agencies in stimulating greater food production, especially of wheat but also of meat, milk, and vegetables. "War gardens" sprang up on thousands of vacant city lots. Even some golf course greens were plowed for corn.

Pennsylvania farmers evidenced their usual common sense in responding to this appeal. Few disrupted their regular crop rotation. Most of them came to the conclusion reached by a Berks County farmer: "We are all considering how to plan our farm operations so as to most nearly meet our country's food needs and at the same time maintain our business on a profitable basis. It is important that we do not let ourselves be unduly influenced by the agitation for doing unusual things in the way of production as a war measure. . . . Therefore let us not enter rashly into plans of trying new crops but expand as much as possible the lines of farming we have been conducting with success."<sup>76</sup> Few Pennsylvania farmers plowed sod land that normally would go into corn and sowed wheat instead. In spite of acute labor, machinery and supply shortage, high costs, and some unfavorable weather, in 1917 and 1918 they exceeded the average production of the preceding five years:

|             | <i>Five Year Average,<br/>1912-1916</i> | <i>1917</i>    | <i>1918</i>    |
|-------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Wheat ..... | 23,732,000 bu.                          | 24,483,000 bu. | 24,718,000 bu. |
| Corn .....  | 59,177,000 bu.                          | 62,212,000 bu. | 62,112,000 bu. |
| Oats .....  | 36,538,000 bu.                          | 41,125,000 bu. | 47,191,000 bu. |

The recently-organized Agricultural Extension Service was particularly effective in helping farmers to make this very creditable contribution to the war effort.

Consumer prices continued to be high during the war. Between 1915 and 1919 the cost of living advanced nearly 100 per cent. As usual, farmers were made the scapegoat; in the view of metropolitan newspapers they were the grossest of war profiteers. Said the *New York Journal of Commerce*, "The war profits to the farmer on wheat must be more than a dollar a bushel. Farmers, as a class, will pocket immense war profits." In 1917 a Philadelphia daily sneered, "Pork, profits and patriotism are trotting along together in the neatest little three-horse hitch imaginable." In 1919 Governor William Sproul presided over a conference of representatives of consumers, industry, and agriculture to assess the blame for the high cost of living. It pinned major responsibility on the farmer.

It is true that many farmers did profit more than usual during the war period, but not anywhere near the extent of profits in industry and commerce. In 1918 the State Grange observed that a United States Treasury Department report showed that in 1917 one food

dealer made a profit of 2183 per cent in excess of his profit in 1916; a liquor dealer, 1220 per cent; a cold storage plant, 472 per cent; a flour miller, 235 per cent; a meat packer, 204 per cent; a soft coal operator, 504 per cent; a department store, 331 per cent.<sup>77</sup> Few Pennsylvania farmers made more than a reasonable return on their investment; many made no profit whatever. Milk producers, especially, were at a disadvantage; in 1918 they received about three and a half cents a quart; and all costs, particularly labor and feed, were extremely high. Some were forced to dispose of their herds. If farmers made money, most of it was used to buy Liberty Bonds.

In an effort to induce farmers to sow more wheat, governmental price-fixing was invoked in 1917 and 1918. The basic price set in 1917 was \$2.20 a bushel, f. o. b. Chicago, with a scale of differentials for different types and grades. No ceiling, however, was set on what the farmer had to buy or on the price of labor. Said Gifford Pinchot in 1918, "The farmer knows as well as any one that the price of \$2.20 a bushel for wheat was not fixed in order to guarantee him a high price. It was fixed in order to guarantee the city consumer against a higher price. . . . [Farmers know] that the price they were getting was being held down by artificial restriction when the prices they were paying were rising at pleasure. . . . Nearly every other producer of the things essential for carrying on the war is assured of a profit. . . . [The farmer] does not want huge profits himself . . . but he does want reasonable business security. . . . At present it is denied to him."<sup>78</sup>

One of the best indices of farm prosperity is land values. In several of the mid-western states the selling price of good farm land advanced more than 100 per cent between 1913 and 1920, from about \$100 to \$200 and even \$500 an acre. In more conservative Pennsylvania the average increment was less than thirty per cent. The failure of taxes on land to rise commensurate with the rise of prices of farm products helped to give it a fictitious value for the time being.

During the three crop years 1917, 1918, and 1919 the purchasing power of wheat was higher, in comparison with the average of other farm commodities, than it ever had been before. Nevertheless, in 1917 a Delaware County farmer showed statistically that the average cost of producing wheat in that county was \$2.14 a bushel, based on a yield of eighteen bushels an acre. Although war-time prices of farm products were high, the costs of production were still higher. This was particularly true of farm labor. If it could be secured at all in competition with the much higher prices paid by factories and industries that operated on a cost-plus basis, it cost two or three times as much as before the war. In April, 1920, farm wages reached a peak of 238 as compared with the base period of 1910-1914, which was 100.

During the war farmers and their families did not quibble over "union hours," specified wage scales, or cost-plus contracts. "The farm

army . . . has never considered such a thing as a strike," said one editor in 1918. "We farmers may kick for better prices and for a square deal for agriculture but while we kick we continue to work and to produce. . . . [The farmer] is quietly going about his business to the tune of sixteen hours per day, cultivating and harvesting and preparing for another crop, limited in acreage only by his strength and ability to get labor."<sup>79</sup> On many farms women and children worked long hours in the field and in the barn while their men were in the army or navy. Farmers and their families set a high standard for patriotic service among producers of materials essential to winning the war.

"The war," said one disillusioned soldier in 1917, "will last a hundred years—five years of fighting and ninety-five years of winding up the barbed wire." If his words are taken figuratively instead of literally, they were inspired prophecy. It will take a century or more to clear up the social and economic maladjustments that were generated by this great catastrophe.

Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, marked the close of hostilities but not the end of the war-time inflationary spiral. This was at its peak in early 1920. Over-sanguine farmers continued to buy with a lavish hand—automobiles, fur coats, more land, stock in oil fields. In July, 1920, the glittering market collapsed. By early 1921 the prices of farm products were back to or below pre-war levels. Europe could no longer pay for our wheat and pork. Farmers were confronted with a vast surplus and a restricted market.

The primary post-war depression of 1920-1922 was part of a general business slump, but the prices of farm products fell faster and much farther than the prices of goods that farmers had to buy. Some farmers had contracted debts with the expectation of repaying them by selling wheat at \$2.50 a bushel and eggs at sixty cents a dozen. Within the space of a few months the prices of these commodities dropped nearly one-half, but the debts remained unchanged. Said the editor of the *North American*, "The violence of the fall in commodity and security prices in this country during the last few months has been unprecedented. . . . Within six months 60 per cent cent . . . of the price advances made during the last six years has been canceled."<sup>80</sup> This post-war deflation conformed to the general pattern that had prevailed after previous wars. Said Fred P. Weaver, "Each war in this country was first followed by a severe drop in prices, then by a brief recovery and then by a gradual decline for a period of fifteen to twenty years."

Viewing the situation in the fall of 1921, a Cambria County farmer quoted a local newspaper: "Taking 100 as the index basis for prices in 1913, farm crop prices now stand at 109, building materials at 212, house furnishings at 273, clothing at 197, fuel and light at 207"; then

the farmer added: "I give for comparison some prices which I paid in 1913 and 1921:

|                                    | 1913   | 1921    |
|------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Lump lime per ton.....             | \$3.00 | \$8.55  |
| 16 pc. acid phosphate per ton..... | \$9.72 | \$17.49 |
| Oliver plow point.....             | .40    | \$1.00  |
| Binder twine, per lb. ....         | .07½   | .14     |
| Re-setting [horse] shoe.....       | .15    | .40     |

About a week ago Cambria County potatoes were loaded on the car at 47 cents a bushel. . . . It would require a yield of [105] bushels per acre at 47 cents to pay for the seed."<sup>81</sup>

During this period of rural depression and relative urban prosperity, 1920-1923, some embittered countrymen seriously proposed that farmers imitate labor organizations and limit output in order to raise values. In 1923 the General Assembly appointed a legislative commission "to ascertain what is wrong with farming in Pennsylvania." It held hearings in different parts of the State but made no contribution to a solution of the problem.

The number of abandoned farms increased. Sheriffs were busy with foreclosures. Mortgage indebtedness, which increased from an index of 100 in 1910 to 182 in 1920-1930, created an acute problem when prices dropped. In 1923 a Clinton County farmer stated, "There is scarcely a farm in this section which, if the buildings were destroyed, could be sold for enough to restore the buildings. Few farms can be sold for what it cost to build the house and barn. . . . At quite a number of public sales this spring, the tax collector and the sheriff were on hand, and before the sale could go on, the tax gatherer was made safe, whether anything was left for the farmer or not."<sup>82</sup> Business failures among Pennsylvania farmers were few, however, as compared to farmers in some western states. In 1924 the United States Department of Agriculture reported that more than eight per cent of the owner farmers in fifteen wheat and corn-producing states lost their farms, with or without legal processes, between 1920 and the spring of 1923. Of those who lost their farms, over two-thirds did so as a result of purchasing them or other farm land at very high prices during the war-time boom period.

Late in 1923 the farmers' economic stress began to ease somewhat. During the next few years agricultural values, unlike industrial values, did not regain all the ground lost in the primary post-war depression. The "farm problem" and "farm relief" continued to be discussed in the halls of Congress. Farmers received relatively less compensation than city workers; the average earnings of the farm family in 1926-1927 were only seventy per cent of its earnings in 1920-1921, whereas the average earnings of urban families remained about the same. Farmers



did not share, proportionately, in the fictitious "Coolidge prosperity" of 1924-1928. Although the cash income of Pennsylvania farmers for 1924-1928 averaged \$245,000,000 a year, the prices of what they had to buy continued to be high and there was little if any profit. Taxes were excessive. In 1927 a retired Fayette County farmer complained, "I put out my farm of 92 acres at \$800 cash rent, and my taxes on the same reached more than \$700."<sup>83</sup>

### THE "GREAT DEPRESSION," 1929-1936

The "roaring twenties" blew up with a resounding bang late in October, 1929, when the security market crashed. Agriculture had had its private post-war depression since 1920; the new collapse of values affected all branches of the economy and was nation-wide, even world-wide. Not until after 1936 did the purchasing power of the farmer begin to rise appreciably. His brief period of advantage during the war was far more than offset by his extended period of disadvantage after the war.

The teachings of history should have prepared the American people for this debacle, but most of them, even some distinguished economists, could not read the handwriting on the wall. In October of that fateful year Irving Fisher and other national authorities assured the public that America was "dwelling upon a permanently high plateau of prosperity." President Herbert Hoover predicted, "We shall soon be within sight of the day when poverty will be banished from the nation." Yet by January, 1931, there were more than 6,000,000 unemployed, some of them veterans who sold apples on street corners in the great cities for a bare living. In the spring of 1932 there were over 15,000,000 unemployed and 6,000,000 were on public relief. Bread lines were common. Pennsylvania, with eight per cent of the population, had ten per cent of the unemployed.

In 1920-1922 agriculture was shocked; in 1929-1936 it was paralyzed. The golden dreams of 1916-1919 turned into nightmares. In 1931 the prices of farm products were the lowest since before the Civil War; the total cash income of Pennsylvania farms was \$123,000,000, which was \$60,000,000 less than in 1929 and averaged only \$800 per farm. In normal times the farmer receives about forty cents of the consumers' dollar; in 1932 he received less than a third. The index of farm prices was at its lowest point in March, 1933, when it was 66 as compared with 100 for the period 1910-1914. In that year 500 bushels of wheat were required to buy a grain binder; in 1919, fifty bushels.

Forced sales of farms were numerous. In April, 1933, Governor Gifford Pinchot issued a proclamation: "Farmers are daily losing homes and farms in large numbers by reason of the foreclosure of mortgages . . . largely because the dollar they are required to pay is worth

far more in good and is much harder to earn than the dollar they borrowed." He called upon holders of farm mortgages to "suspend all . . . execution processes . . . during the present economic emergency, except where a mortgagor is clearly able to pay his indebtedness."<sup>84</sup> So great was the resentment of farmers at foreclosures that in some states neighbors assembled at a sheriff's sale and forcibly prevented free bidding, causing the property to be knocked down to one of their number for a nominal price, after which it was returned to the farmer. No such extra-legal procedures were reported in Pennsylvania, but frequently neighbors pooled their resources in order to set friends on their feet again. The proportion of forced sales to the total number of farms was small in Pennsylvania as compared with western states; most farmers had played it safe during the boom years.

In September, 1934, the General Assembly met in special session to consider unemployment relief. In 1935 there were 22,000 "farm operators," or twelve per cent of the total number of farm families, who were receiving relief grants. Most of these, however, were not *bona fide* farmers; they were urban unemployed and coal miners who had temporarily squatted on small parcels of land for the duration of the depression. Few of those who had chosen farming as their permanent vocation were on public relief. Some of the relievers abused the privilege. In 1935 *Pennsylvania Farmer* reported, "We are told of a farmer who while on relief has purchased a new manure spreader and a new gang plow for his tractor. Another man is reported to have sold his farm for \$10,000 which he still has, but he has been on relief for many months."<sup>85</sup> Some of these chiselers took the position that they were entitled to this aid because the cities had lived on the fat of the land for several generations and should now pay back part of the unearned increment to farmers.

In severe depression periods agriculture acts as a shock-absorber to industry; it carries on the land many urban people for whom no remunerative employment is available in cities. In 1932, when there were 1,500,000 unemployed in the State and when wheat was selling at the lowest price since the time of Queen Elizabeth, many more people returned to farms than left them. The country-ward movement was accelerated during 1933 and 1934. City newspapers promoted a "back-to-the-land" movement as a means of assuring economic independence for unemployed urban workers. Much of this counsel was misdirected. Commented *Pennsylvania Farmer* "Those eminent armchair agriculturists, the editors of city papers . . . are calling attention to the fact that the state owns large areas of cheap land, . . . on which the unemployed might be located and where they might be financed until they

are able to repay the loans made to them, presumably from the state treasury . . . They ignore the fact that the state lands, or such areas of them as were once called farms, are public property for the very reason that they could not return a living to those who knew something about farming . . . even when prices of their products were much higher than now . . . farming requires capital, skill and business ability—all of which the unemployed lack.”<sup>86</sup> Some impoverished city workers who had been reared on farms were able to wring a livelihood from the land temporarily. After 1935 the trend of population cityward was resumed.

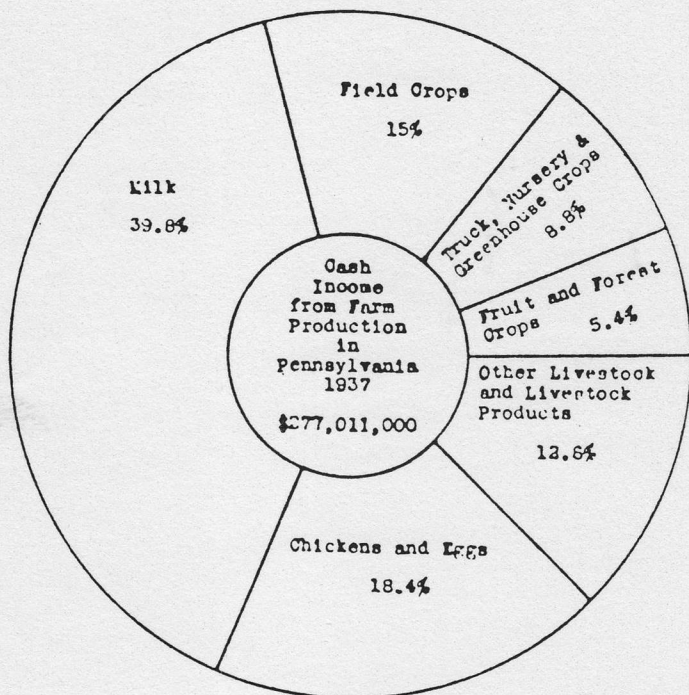
The bewilderment, panic, bitterness, and loss of self-confidence of many urban unemployed from 1929 to 1936 were not much in evidence among farmers; they had jobs and most of them could make at least a meager living. The farmer’s wife bore her full share of the load. Long-unused means of making and saving money on the farm were again brought into play. Household arts and crafts of an earlier day were revived—making baskets, quilts, and chairs. Soap-making, fruit and vegetable drying, canning, pickling, preserving, and bread making filled her busy days. The farmer’s wife was a true helpmeet in this emergency; she had taken her man “for better or for worse.”

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” These ringing words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, gave new courage and hope to the nation. His administration immediately set in motion activities that led to a political, economic, and social revolution. The measures taken by the federal government to bring the nation out of its doldrums (Chapter 14) may be controversial as to the principle involved and as to method, but they did bolster the staggering economy. In 1935 a distinct upward trend was evident. In 1937 the cash income of Pennsylvania farmers was \$274,000,000, about twice what it had been in 1931. By 1940 the purchasing power of the Pennsylvania farmer was 96 as compared with the prosperous period of 1910-1914, and was thirteen points above that of the nation as a whole. The chief sources of farm income that year were:<sup>87</sup>

|                        |               |                |              |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| Dairy products.....    | \$100,731,000 | Potatoes ..... | \$12,350,000 |
| Eggs .....             | 33,730,000    | Hogs .....     | 8,899,000    |
| Cattle and calves..... | 28,124,000    | Wheat .....    | 7,827,000    |
| Truck Crops.....       | 15,574,000    | Apples .....   | 6,429,000    |
| Chickens .....         | 14,427,000    | Tobacco .....  | 5,864,000    |
|                        |               | Corn .....     | 4,397,000    |

The outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939 was the signal for the beginning of another inflationary spiral. By 1940 the United

States, though not actually engaged in the conflict, was very much involved; the dividing line between defense and war was thin. Once again history was about to repeat itself.



*Crops and farm income*



## THE GRANGE

After 1870 the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange, was foremost among agricultural organizations in Pennsylvania. It was founded on December 4, 1867, in Washington, D. C., by a federal employee, Oliver H. Kelly, with the cooperation of William Saunders, who also was employed by the government and had been a gardener at Germantown. It was an expression of the economic distress and social unrest among farmers at that time.

On April 8, 1868, Kelly granted the first dispensation in the nation for a subordinate or local grange to W. T. Hildrif, D. W. Gross, and G. Small of Harrisburg. This local never functioned. The first active subordinate grange in this State was Eagle Grange at Montgomery, Lycoming County; this was chartered March 4, 1871, mainly through the efforts of Luke Eger.<sup>15</sup> By 1873 there were twenty-five granges in Berks, Bucks, Chester, Crawford, Cumberland, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lycoming, Monroe, and Montgomery counties. On September 18, 1873, delegates from twenty-two of these met at Reading to organize the Pennsylvania State Grange. David B. Mauger of Berks County was the first State Master.

During the next few years the order had a phenomenal growth. By 1875 there were over 400 subordinate granges having 18,000 members;

a year later, 626 granges with 28,174 members. The first issue of a weekly paper, *The Farmers' Friend and Grange Advocate*, appeared in October, 1874. What is thought to have been the first Pomona or district grange in the United States was organized on May 11, 1875, to serve Dauphin and Perry counties. By 1880 Pennsylvania was one of the strongest grange states in the Union, in recognition of which the National Grange held its annual meeting at Philadelphia in 1886.

The original objective of this first mass movement of American farmers was educational. In its first printed circular, issued November 1, 1867, the founder stated, "Its purpose is to encourage and advance education in all branches of agriculture." In 1870, William Saunders amplified this statement: "To learn and apply the revelations of science as far as it relates to the farmers' products . . . are the ultimate objects of our organization." At the first delegate session of the National Grange in 1873, however, a much broader declaration of purpose was adopted. "We propose meeting together, talking together, working together, buying together, selling together and in general acting together for our mutual protection and advancement. . . . We must dispense with the surplus of middlemen."<sup>16</sup> This new point of view resulted from the panic of 1873 and the greatly intensified disadvantage of farmers in the period between 1870 and 1880.

The organization then embarked upon a great variety of cooperative enterprises, such as buying and selling, fire and life insurance, banking, the manufacture of farm and home equipment, retail stores. In 1877 the Pennsylvania State Grange solicited the patronage of its members in the purchase of clothing, furniture, and all kinds of farm supplies. By 1880 most of these enterprises, except cooperative buying of supplies and insurance, had failed. This brought the Order into disrepute, especially with those who had joined expecting it to work political and economic miracles. The membership fell off as fast as it had been built up. By 1890 the Grange was at low ebb in this and other states.

The order weathered the storm because it had inherent strength in its all-around program for the betterment of the economic, social, and educational conditions of farmers. A significant source of that strength was the participation, as members, of farm women and of children over fourteen years of age; it represented the farm home as a whole and conserved family life. In 1882 the National Grange stated, "We would especially urge the importance of woman's mission in the Grange. No social, educational or moral endeavor can prosper without her sympathy and support. The founders of the Grange wisely opened the door and bade her welcome." Four Grange offices were occupied exclusively by women, and they were eligible for any office, including that of Master.

The ebb tide of interest in the Grange began to turn about 1890. By 1900 there were 526 subordinate granges in Pennsylvania, with a membership of 20,000. In 1940 Pennsylvania was third among the

states in Grange strength, with 757 active granges and 62,679 members. In addition, there were 143 Juvenile Granges (members eight to fourteen years old, whose parents were eligible to membership in the Grange), with 4,000 members, and fifty-eight Pomona Granges. In general, the northern counties were strongest in Grange membership, the southeastern counties weakest, largely because most Pennsylvania German farmers look with disfavor on secret societies of any kind. The annual meetings of the State Grange brought together many hundreds of delegates and were fairly representative of Pennsylvania agriculture. The monthly *Pennsylvania Grange News*, established in 1903, went into 43,000 farm homes.

Among auxiliary organizations operated by the Grange were the Keystone Grange Exchange, a cooperative purchasing agency; twenty-four Grange Mutual Fire Insurance Companies, with risks aggregating \$110,000,000; an automobile liability insurance company; and the Farmers' and Traders' Life Insurance Company. At its annual meetings in 1905 and 1906 the State Grange authorized the formation of Grange National Banks; and several were established.

For three-quarters of a century, the Grange has been a powerful voice for the betterment of the economic, social, and educational conditions of rural Pennsylvania. It has pressed for the improvement of rural schools and highways, the equalization of school and highway funds, rural free delivery and parcels' post, reduction of the tax levy on real estate, the conservation of natural resources, and other commendable objectives, many of which have been realized. It has constantly advocated home rule and freedom of rural people from domination by the state or federal government. It championed woman suffrage, and has been a staunch supporter of agricultural education. At the annual meeting of the State Grange in 1922 it was voted to raise funds to build a dormitory for girls at The Pennsylvania State College. This was an appropriate objective in view of the recognition given to women in the Order. About \$100,000 was contributed by practically all the subordinate granges in the State.<sup>17</sup> The "Grange Dormitory" was dedicated on August 14, 1929.

The Grange is a potent social factor in rural communities. At the monthly or semi-monthly meetings farmers, their wives, and older children find opportunity for diversion—drama, singing, dancing, picnic suppers, athletic contests—as well as for the discussion of timely farm problems. The literary program may include talks and discussions on agricultural topics and a review of current events and reading matter. The meetings are held in schoolhouses, village halls, and sometimes in homes; but most granges have built Grange Halls. In 1926 more than 400 subordinate granges owned the buildings in which they met; these were valued at \$2,000,000. Some farmers are impatient with

the elaborate secret ritual of the Grange, but most of them find it beautifully symbolic of the major objectives of the Order.



## STATE FAIRS

The agricultural fair is an important rural institution. Its origin may be traced to medieval Europe and even to more primitive times. For centuries the primary objectives were commerce and trade. Since 1800 the objectives have been commerce, education, and recreation; the relative emphasis placed on each has varied with the time and place. Early agricultural fairs in Pennsylvania were primarily educational in purpose. In recent years the commercial and social objectives have been more prominent in most fairs. The "golden age" of the agricultural fair was from 1850 to 1870; during this period it was the most common associated effort of farmers, and the chief agency for the dissemination of new ideas on farming, better types of livestock and crops, and improved farm machinery.

The first *bona fide* State fair was that held in 1851 at Harrisburg by the State Agricultural Society, but a number of exhibitions had been held previously that had attracted more than local interest. Among these were two exhibitions by the first Pennsylvania Agricultural Society, in 1823 at Paoli, and in 1824 at Chester. The society perished soon after. The exhibitions of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting

Agriculture, especially those held between 1840 and 1850, attracted State-wide interest. In 1839 the General Assembly revived the Act of March, 1821, which granted to the Society \$50 annually for each member of the House from the city and county of Philadelphia, this to be used for premiums at exhibitions.<sup>48</sup> The Society also awarded premiums to the winners of plowing matches and "for the best field of wheat, not less than three acres." Similar awards were made for the best fields of corn, oats, rye, barley, potatoes, sugar beets, carrots, parsnips, and turnips.

At all early exhibitions, county and State, the plowing match was the lodestone that drew farmers. *Farmers' Cabinet* thus reports the exhibition of 1841: "The immense concourse of persons who assembled together on the second day of the Exhibition of the Philadelphia Agricultural Society, to witness the trial of Ploughs, showed very clearly the intense interest with which the subject was viewed by all classes; indeed, there is no object which at the present time is at all comparable with it in novelty, usefulness, or general importance."<sup>49</sup> The exhibition of the Society at Rising Sun, October 8-9, 1851, was particularly outstanding.

After the State Agricultural Society was organized, in 1851, the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture continued to hold fairs that compared favorably with those of the new organization. There was intense rivalry between the two groups. In 1853 fifteen members of the Philadelphia society contributed \$1,000 each to purchase permanent exhibition grounds at Mount Airy, near Philadelphia, but the tract never was used for this purpose. The last large exhibition was in 1855, on the banks of the Schuylkill. In October, 1856, it cooperated with the United States Agricultural Society which held its second annual exhibition on the same site. Thereafter the State Agricultural Society was in undisputed control of State fairs.

The first State fair under the auspices of the State Agricultural Society was at Harrisburg on October 29-31, 1851.<sup>50</sup> During the next half century forty-six fairs were held, nine at Philadelphia, three each at Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Lancaster, and one or more at Norristown, Williamsport, Easton, Scranton, Erie, York, Bethlehem, Indiana, Uniontown, Johnstown, and other points. No fairs were held in 1883 and 1894. In 1892 there were two fairs, at Scranton on September 5-10, and at Lancaster on October 10-15.

Most of the exhibitions were held in cooperation with the fairs of county agricultural societies. At some points the Society erected buildings which were left for the use of the county society; its contributions in this respect were said to exceed \$200,000. It contributed \$1,000 toward the Centennial Exposition in 1876. In 1880 its fair at Philadelphia was in cooperation with the International Sheep and

Wool Exhibition, to which the Society contributed \$12,500. The fair at Norristown scheduled for October 1-3, 1862, was postponed two weeks "On account of the threatened invasion of the State by the Southern army."<sup>51</sup>

The first State fair at Harrisburg was a great success. The grounds were beautifully located on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna about one mile north of Harrisburg. The attendance was variously estimated at 35,000 to 45,000. The citizens of Harrisburg were so enthusiastic about it that they offered to raise funds to purchase thirty acres of land, erect suitable buildings thereon, and donate the property to the Society if it would agree to hold the State fair there annually. The Society decided, however, to hold fairs in a different part of the State each year.

The second State fair, at Lancaster in 1852, was an even more glittering success; attendance was said to be "probably unprecedented in the history of state agricultural societies." The third fair, at Pittsburgh in 1853, was witnessed by 90,000 to 100,000 people." The proceeds of that fair amounted to \$16,000, exceeding by \$2,000 the receipts of any ever held in the United States."<sup>52</sup> The fourth fair, at Philadelphia, was thus described by the *Cultivator*: "The Pennsylvania State Fair, which was held at Powelton, near Philadelphia, last week, was one of the most successful in every respect, that has ever been in this country. Though none but members, or those who paid \$1, were admitted the first two days, yet the attendance was very large, but on Thursday, when the charge was reduced to 25 cts., nearly Fifty Thousand Single and Family tickets, were sold, and it was estimated that at least 100,000 persons visited the grounds during the day."<sup>53</sup>

This was an auspicious beginning. The Society continued to hold exhibitions annually throughout the State with varying degrees of success, until 1884, when it decided to develop a permanent location at Philadelphia. This proved to be a costly mistake. A thirty-acre tract was leased for ten years and buildings erected on it at a cost of \$80,000. The 1885 fair, which extended from September 23 to October 14, was conducted at a loss of \$8,000. In 1886 the President admitted, "We are compelled to report that your Society is at present financially embarrassed."<sup>54</sup> By 1888 it was in the red \$100,000. Foreclosure on the Philadelphia exhibition grounds and bankruptcy followed. The General Assembly declined to come to its aid. For a few years the now thoroughly discredited State fair was peddled around to the highest bidder among county agricultural societies, but it had ceased to be an important factor in Pennsylvania agriculture. The last exhibition was at Johnstown, in 1897.<sup>55</sup>

After the unlamented demise of the fair of the State Agricultural Society, persistent efforts were made to secure a State fair worthy of

the name. E. S. Bayard, editor of *National Stockman and Farmer*, led this movement.<sup>56</sup> In 1899 he called the first meeting for this purpose. Out of it came the organization of the State Livestock Breeders' Association, which immediately began to agitate for a State fair. Soon it was joined by the Dairy Union and the State Horticultural Association. In 1905 these organizations introduced in the General Assembly a bill to appropriate \$150,000 to purchase a site, erect buildings, and provide \$50,000 for premiums for two years.<sup>57</sup> The bill failed to pass in 1905 and also in 1907, 1909, 1911, and 1913, largely because of opposition from the Pennsylvania Fair Association, which thought that a State fair might jeopardize State appropriations to county fairs. A bill to authorize the appointment of a State Fair Commission passed both houses in 1909, but was vetoed by Governor Edwin S. Stewart for financial reasons.

In his message to the Legislature in January, 1913, Governor John K. Tener recommended an appropriation of \$500,000 to establish a State fair, but no action was taken. On the recommendation of Governor William C. Sproul, the General Assembly of 1921 passed an Act creating a State Fair Commission with an appropriation of \$15,000 to inspect proposed sites and recommend a plan of operation to the next legislature. The Commission discharged its function, but no action was taken by the General Assembly of 1923. In 1925 the State Chamber of Commerce developed a plan for a privately-financed State fair. By this time, however, the midwinter State Farm Products Show had so convincingly demonstrated its usefulness as a practicable substitute for a State fair that agitation for the fair ceased.

A few other fairs have been of more than local significance. For about twenty-five years the Bucks County Agricultural and Mechanical Institute, which was incorporated September 16, 1857, but which had existed as the Bucks County Agricultural Society since 1844, held fairs that attracted exhibitors and attendance from far beyond the county. The Grange Fair and Encampment at Centre Hall, Centre County, has been a major attraction for farmers throughout central Pennsylvania every year since it was founded in 1873 by Leonard Rhone. The agricultural exhibits of the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia, May 10 to November 10, 1876, were outstanding, especially of farm machinery. About 1896 the Grangers' Inter-State Exposition and the Mount Gretna Agricultural, Mechanical and Industrial Exposition were ambitious projects. From 1900 to 1915, the annual grange picnic and exhibition at Williams' Grove, on a beautiful island in Yellow Breeches Creek, Cumberland County, attracted many thousands.

The Fat Stock Show at Pittsburgh was one of the best in the country; carlot exhibits came to it from midwestern states as well as from Penn-

sylvania. After 1900 it was superseded by the International Livestock Exposition at Chicago—the “Supreme Court of Beef Cattle”—and by the Lancaster Fat Cattle Show. Exhibits in the Palace of Agriculture of the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition held at Philadelphia in the summer of 1926 were disappointing as a whole, but the show of livestock was the largest ever seen in Pennsylvania—over 3,000 head. The Potato Exposition held at State College August 19-22, 1929, was said to have been “the greatest exhibition and demonstration of potato machinery in America.” Certain county fairs, especially those at Lancaster, York, Allentown, and Reading, have attracted attendance and exhibits from many counties.

### COUNTY AND COMMUNITY FAIRS

After State support was withdrawn from the Berkshire type of county agricultural societies, in 1825, the number of these societies and fairs dwindled. They had a rebirth in 1851 with State support under the charter of the State Agricultural Society. In 1854 there were twenty-three county fairs. Of these, the Bucks, Berks, Chester, Lancaster, and York fairs were strongest. By 1857 there were seventy-one county and community organizations holding exhibitions.<sup>58</sup> In 1892 there were eighty-one, of which fifty were organized on the stock plan and thirty-one on the mutual plan. The aggregate attendance that year was 415,500.<sup>59</sup>

Besides offering premiums for superior farm products on exhibition at the fair, many organizations had Visiting Committees, which reported in detail methods followed by the most outstanding farmers of the county and awarded premiums “for the best farm.” This may be considered a forerunner of the present Master Farmer award. Sometimes corn husking matches were held at the exhibitions. Each contestant was given a shock of corn having exactly the same number of ears as the shocks of other contestants. The man who could shuck all the ears clean and tie up the fodder in the shortest time was the winner. At a content held at the Chester County fair in 1858, Abraham Jackson husked 108 ears in eight minutes.<sup>60</sup>

Under successive Acts, the General Assembly has appropriated funds for the partial support of county fairs. In 1907 the sum was \$500 to each fair; the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture was responsible for administering the Act. The money could be used only for paying premiums. Subsequently these grants were equal in amount to one-half the sum paid as premiums on farm exhibits up to \$1,000 for each fair, with a maximum of \$2,000 to a county when more than one fair was held. In 1921 the county associations paid \$224,000 as premiums and were reimbursed \$55,000 by the State. In order to qualify for state aid, the fair association must be incorporated and hold exhibitions of not less than three days' duration.



After 1910, neighborhood or community fairs were more numerous. The general character of these exhibitions was set forth by *Pennsylvania Farmer* in 1931: "The community farm show has become an established institution in hundreds of rural sections of this state. Farm folks, both young and old, have taken hold of it, adapted it to their interests and needs. . . . Take those in Crawford County, for example. Ten of these shows were held in that county during the fall months of 1930. At these ten were exhibited 7,803 products from the farms and 3,599 products from the farm homes of the county. In connection with them were conducted horse pulling contests, livestock judging contests, demonstrations by boys and girls, parades and athletic events. Evening meetings featuring educational and entertainment programs were a part of the show activities. The total attendance at these ten events was 17,000 and included a large portion of the rural people of Crawford County. In this attendance were included the children in 58 of the rural schools of the county as well as members of the Four-H clubs. These coming farmers . . . constituted a goodly portion of the 'life' of the shows."<sup>61</sup> Community fairs were a reversion to the Berkshire type of fair of 1815, which most county fairs no longer exemplified.

One of the most outstanding community county fairs was the annual Farmers' Day at Ephrata, Lancaster County. More than 50,000 people from southeastern counties attended this show. Said one observer in 1929, "For three days all the show windows on main street were emptied of their regular wares and filled with products from the farm and the farm home. . . . Nine loads of feeder cattle were shown in the nearby stockyards. . . . Four squares on the main street of the town were roped off to accommodate the commercial exhibits of household appliances, heating plants, radios, automobiles, etc. . . . A parade each evening headed by local bands and orchestras added to the entertainment of the party. Above all the fine community spirit . . . among the thousands in attendance each day was most outstanding."<sup>62</sup>



*Old-time haying*

## COUNTRY LIFE

SINCE 1840 the process of urbanizing country people has constantly accelerated. They are rapidly losing the characteristics that once sharply distinguished them from city people and are acquiring the characteristics of urban residents in intellectual interests, social customs, dress, and home life. They now are within a few hours or a few minutes by automobile of a city or town, and are kept in touch with world affairs by the daily newspaper and radio. Many of their children go to consolidated schools, and the family may attend church in town. Each new application of science to agriculture has helped to undermine long-established rural customs. The replacement of self-sufficing farming by commercial farming has tended to develop greater dependence on cooperative action and less on individual effort. Farmers are no longer a class set apart; they are cosmopolitan.

### RURAL SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The institutions that have struck their roots most deeply into the soil of rural life are the home, church, and school. Prior to 1880, nearly everyone in the country went to church; it was the center of the social as well as the religious life of the community. The same was true, though to a less degree, of the school. In recent years the Grange, Farmers' Clubs, Women's Clubs, Parent-Teachers' Associations, Agricultural Extension Associations, and other agencies have had important social functions. The more rural the county, the greater the ratio of social organizations to the number of people; thinly settled districts have more, in proportion to population, than more urbanized sections.

The admission of women as members of the Grange has contributed largely to rural social life. Through this organization, farmers and their wives and children have come together for friendly intercourse at picnics, festivals, and other social activities. In 1929, Chester County had seven community Farmers' Clubs, several of which had been meeting for more than seventy years. Their objectives were "to promote agricultural interests and social fellowship." All the family attended the meetings, which were held in farm homes.

The Pennsylvania Society of Farm Women, organized in 1914, developed into an important rural institution. In 1940 it had forty-two local units with over 1,000 members, mainly in the southeastern counties. The membership was mostly Pennsylvania Germans, who do not approve of secret societies. Originally the organization was called *Die Hausfrauen*. Meetings were held once a month, usually at a home, and were devoted to home and community betterment. Parent-Teachers' Associations in connection with public schools have had an important social as well as educational influence. Many farmers are members of secret societies other than the Grange.

By 1940, youth organizations, as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Four-H Clubs, and Future Farmers of America, were functioning effectively in most rural communities; but in some there was a dearth of such activities. A survey of 225 families in Locust Township, Columbia County, made in 1930 revealed, "The social and recreational activities of the boys and girls of farm families centered in the school and the church. . . . The entire absence of organizations of boy scouts, camp fire girls, 4-H clubs, junior granges, and similar groups left a large majority of the youth without helpful leadership along recreational, entertainment, and vocational lines."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the constantly-increasing speed and tension of rural life, the grace of neighborliness has not been lost. Farmers still "swap work," but not to the extent that they did fifty years ago. In 1870, a threshing outfit operated by five teams brought the farmers of a neighborhood together in cooperative labor. The threshing-day dinner and supper were occasions for much merry-making. Many Pomona and subordinate Granges have sponsored a series of "Neighbor Nights" devoted to visiting, picnics, and other social activities.

Before 1880, visits of several days' duration, sometimes several weeks', were common, especially among Pennsylvania Germans. After automobiles came into general use, long visits declined in popularity except among the Old Order Amish, most of whom live in compact groups of the same faith and abjure automobiles. According to Walter M. Kollmorgen, "There are only about thirty family names in the community and the great majority of the Amish families today have one or only half a dozen family names. During the course of the last two centuries these few families have intermarried constantly, so that

the community is now one large *Freundschaft*, a term used to designate kinfolks."<sup>2</sup>

In time of sickness and distress, the neighborliness of country people is expressed in many helpful ways. In 1922 a Bucks County farmer was overtaken by severe illness. As reported by *Pennsylvania Farmer*, "Because he knew the potato crop was still in the ground . . . he worried, and his worriment militated against recovery. . . . Twenty-five of his neighbors . . . arrived unexpectedly at [his] farm Sunday . . . and before evening harvested 600 bushels of potatoes."<sup>3</sup> In 1927, according to *National Stockman and Farmer*, "A good farmer in Lebanon county had his arm torn off in a feed chopper the week before he had planned to make his hay. . . . Last week thirty of his neighbors went to his farm and put his hay crop away. They further told him not to worry, for his wheat and oats harvest will be well cared for."<sup>4</sup> If the barn of an Amishman burns down, his neighbors, perhaps numbering 200, gather at the farm one morning, and by nightfall have built a new barn. Countless other examples of the neighborly spirit that still prevails in the Pennsylvania countryside could be cited.

#### SOCIAL EVENTS IN THE HOME

Births, weddings, and funerals long have been outstanding events in rural social life, particularly among Pennsylvania Germans. In these, as in other respects, the trend is toward conformity to the prevailing urban custom; but some sectarians have preserved many of the distinctive social traditions of their respective groups. "In all sects," says Cornelius Weygandt, "much is made of birth, marriage and death. . . . Great preparations are made at home for the expected child. . . . The birth is carefully recorded in the family Bible. Yesterday it was recorded, too, in a *geburtsschein*, and baptism in a *tauf-schein*, in illuminated writing, and the records framed and hung on the wall like a sampler."<sup>5</sup>

The following description of Amish courtship and marriage of the present day might have been written two centuries ago: "During the courting period the young man calls on the girl after she (apparently) and the family (actually) have retired. He drives up to the house in his topless buggy and with the aid of a flashlight or buggy light makes his presence known. If the girl is interested she quietly descends the stairs to meet the caller. . . . Many preparations have been made during the years preceding the marriage. The girl will have spent much time filling a hope or dower chest with materials to set up housekeeping.

"Weddings in the Old Order Amish community always take place after the harvest season, and custom decrees that the wedding day fall on a Tuesday or Thursday. Some time before the wedding a Schteckleimann—a deacon or minister acting in the capacity of so-

licitor, like Abraham's servant—is selected to learn the attitude of the girl's parents concerning the marriage. . . . The function of this intermediary has become quite nominal in that the young man now is fully aware of the attitude of the girl and her parents. . . . Weddings are the most important social events known to the Amish. From 100 to 300 guests may be invited and a king's feast is prepared for them. The newly wedded couple later makes special visits to all families who participated in the wedding and at this time they receive the wedding gifts. Several weeks may be spent in this round of visiting."<sup>8</sup>

An Amish wedding ceremony may require three or four hours. There is a long sermon and much singing in slow time (hymns resembling Gregorian chants). Guests arrive about 8:30 A. M. and stay until late into the night. The return from the honeymoon of Pennsylvania Germans is celebrated by a charivari or ear-splitting serenade by a "Deutsch Band"—young people making a horrendous noise by pounding an old circular saw with a hammer; the original purpose was to drive away evil spirits.

Funerals are major social events among Pennsylvania Germans. Some families still follow the ancient custom of serving a bountiful feast. The custom of providing "funeral baked meats" no longer is common among most Pennsylvania Germans, but the Amish still cling to this tradition.

Until recent years, Christmas was observed almost wholly as a religious festival in the home and church. Members of the family might make simple gifts to each other, mostly home-made. Not until after 1840 were Christmas trees used generally. After 1880, Christmas was commercialized; gradually it became, unhappily, as much a business event as a religious festival.

Until after 1880, the Easter Egg Tree was popular among Pennsylvania Germans. A leafless little tree was strung with eggs, sometimes as many as 500. Before chemical dyes were available, eggs were dyed several colors with vegetable decoctions. Traditional Hallow-e'en goings-on prevailed until after 1900—such pranks as gate lifting, bell ringing, tick-tacking windows, the "lofting" of buggies and wagons to such impossible places as the roof of the carriage shed, and parades of "fantasticals" or "mummers."

### FROLICS AND FESTIVALS

Frolics or bees, in which communal labor was pleasantly combined with entertainment, were common in the days of self-sufficing farming, but have gradually disappeared under the impact of commercial agriculture. The husking bee and apple butter bee, however, still are enjoyed in some rural districts. In 1931 *Pennsylvania Farmer* described a husking bee in Sullivan County: "Imagine a large bank barn with a double threshing floor, and approximately 700 bushels of



unhusked corn piled in the center of it. . . . The corn huskers are seated on rough benches set up around the pile of corn. As they husk, the ears are tossed across their shoulders into the bins. . . . This is . . . an annual affair eagerly looked forward to by the folks living in one of the mountain valleys of Sullivan county. . . . It draws old and young alike. They covet the finding of a red ear as much as their elders ever did. They enjoy sandwiches made from meat of one of 'Daddy' Norton's fattened lambs. And Grandmother's cookies, cakes and coffee. . . . The 250 people present . . . had a splendid evening and with it all they helped Mr. Norton finish quickly a task which if he had to do it alone, would have become a tiresome job."<sup>7</sup>

A few barn raisings still take place, mainly in "Dutch country." Says an interested observer, "The rapidity with which a barn is erected by this cooperative method is amazing to outsiders. First, several carpenters are hired to prepare the foundation for the barn and to pre-cut all the required pieces of lumber. When these preliminaries are done, word is sent out that the barn-raising is to take place on a certain day. Farmers come from all directions early in the morning and the work of setting up the barn begins immediately under the direction of a foreman or boss. By evening, a \$5,000 to \$10,000 barn stands erected, although the shingles may not all be in place. It is not unusual for 200 and 300 farmers . . . to take part. . . . All get a big dinner."<sup>8</sup>

Until about 1890, woodchopping bees were common; they still are found in a few districts. Neighbors came to the farm in the afternoon and chopped and split long piles of wood. Then they enjoyed a roast turkey supper, after which the living room was cleared for square dancing. Apple butter bees, quilting bees, butchering, and other informal neighborly cooperation are still popular in some districts but are far less common than before 1900. A survey of the social activities of farm families in the Crooked Creek area of Indiana and Armstrong counties made in 1936 revealed that the principal diversions of rural people were:<sup>9</sup>

|                            | <i>Men, per cent</i> | <i>Women, per cent</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Visiting .....             | 61.2                 | 74.4                   |
| Home entertainment .....   | 51.5                 | 65.5                   |
| Church entertainment ..... | 67.3                 | 72.4                   |
| School entertainment ..... | 44.                  | 52.7                   |
| Picnics .....              | 62.4                 | 62.9                   |
| Holiday celebrations ..... | 57.4                 | 56.7                   |
| Quiltings .....            |                      | 22.4                   |

Various types of festivals and parties in which the objective is wholly social provide diversion in every rural community. From 1850 until about 1900, the Strawberry Festival was in vogue. It was commonly

held at the church or school on a warm June evening. The grounds were adorned with gaily-colored Japanese lanterns strung on wires stretched between trees—beautiful when lighted but causing excitement when the wind blew and they caught on fire. The men set up long tables and benches and turned the handles of ice cream freezers; the women capped the strawberries and served tremendous helpings of them with ice cream and cake; the children hung around waiting for an opportunity to lick the blades of the ice cream freezer to which some of the delectable refreshment clung. Harvest Home festivals or picnics, graced by imposing rows of pumpkin and apple pies and gallons of sweet cider, have been a popular rural social diversion for many years. About 1890, oyster suppers in winter, followed by square dancing, drew country youth like a magnet.

Among neighborhood social occasions held in homes, none was more popular among young people than those commonly designated as “kissing parties”—games in which either the penalty or the reward was a kiss. Young married couples and jolly older folks often joined in the fun. Sometimes the games were accompanied by a fiddle, but more commonly time was marked by clapping hands and stamping feet:

Needle's eye, as I supply  
The thread that runs so truly,  
Many a lass have I let pass  
Because I wanted you.

After the games, refreshments were served—doughnuts, baked beans, ginger bread, cake, home-made ice cream, sweet cider. Perhaps there was a candy-pull of home-made molasses taffy. The party over, sled or sleigh loads of young couples drove home under the paling stars, the girls snuggled beneath buffalo robes with their feet on hot soapstones, singing “Jingle Bells” and other rollicking songs to the accompaniment of sleigh bells.

Until about 1890, the community singing school was a social event of the first order. So was the spelling match at the district school; the parents came out to it in force and the best spellers ranged themselves on opposite sides of the room as sides were chosen. The “little red schoolhouse” was the scene of many a program of recitations, dialogues, and debates on the last day of school. The debates were likely to be on such portentous questions as “Which is the greater evil, slavery or intemperance?” or “Which is mightier, the sword or the pen?”

“Literary Night” at the district school was a gala occasion. About 1896, the program might include a parody of a famous school day ditty:

Mary had a little lamb  
She loved it every minute.  
She used to comb and card the wool  
Because she thought she'd spin it.  
But Cleveland took the tariff off  
And so she had to skin it.

If the neighborhood was predominantly Republican, this rhyme was greeted with uproarious applause. A soulful rendition of "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight" or "Bingen on the Rhine" brought the audience near to tears. The homeliest girl in the room recited defiantly, "The Lips That Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine." The program might close with a debate on "*Resolved*: That our nation will crumble and fall as did ancient Rome." After the last thrilling word had been spoken and the bustle of departure was at hand, the young men stood outside the door and bashfully asked the fair ones of their choice as they emerged, "May I see you home?"

Church, school, Grange, and community picnics were the scene of much enjoyment, prodigious eating, and spectacular feats of athletic skill. Most picnics were for a day or afternoon, as on the Fourth of July, but some extended for several days and rivalled county fairs in interest. Such was the Grange Picnic and Encampment, later called the Grangers' Interstate Picnic and Exhibition, which was held annually at Williams' Grove, near Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, from 1874 until 1915. Some years more than 50,000 people were present to listen to the addresses, inspect the exhibits, enjoy the entertainment, and meet friends from far and near. The picnic of 1887 was described by the Harrisburg *Patriot*: "There were forty thousand people on one day on forty acres of land, the biggest similar gathering of farmers in the United States. . . . On the great Thursday one sees nothing but the crowd, the dust beneath his feet and the tall trees overhead. The \$2,000,000 worth of farm machinery and the exhibits of cereals, cattle, hogs, horses and domestic articles are under such a cloud of dust that they are passed by almost unnoticed; the farmers have come here earlier in the week to see them. . . . The irresistible fakir is here and is full of business. . . . The lady balloon vendor is here in all her glory. . . . Thousands crowd into the auditorium to hear addresses by the Governor and prominent grangers."<sup>10</sup>

The Grange Encampment at Centre Hall, Centre County, was begun as a one-day basket picnic in 1874 with no exhibits. By 1915 it had developed into a ten-day event with exhibits, entertainment, and political speeches. Farm families from all over central Pennsylvania rented the 500 or more tents for the duration. In 1911 more than 300 one-day picnics were sponsored by the Grange alone.

Auctions, sales, or vendues are an important social event in rural Pennsylvania. These combinations of thrift and pleasure commonly

are held during the late winter or early spring, sometimes in the autumn. Few farmers miss the opportunity to attend a sale even when they have no thought of buying anything. Rural school teachers often find it expedient to dismiss their pupils when a sale is advertised in the neighborhood. A vendue is made necessary by death, retirement, mortgage debt, or removal to a new location. The sum realized for articles sold usually is fully as much as they were worth. Until recent years refreshments were provided, sometimes for several hundred people.

The somber aspects of a vendue were noted by Cornelius Weygandt: "It was pathetic to see a melodeon go for a like [small] sum. It was, perhaps, not in the best of condition, but when one thought of the family gatherings at which it had been played, the hymns and old songs in 'Deutsch' and in English that had been sung to it, how intimately it had been of the very center of the life of the family, it had seemed better it had been burned with the trash than sold for a song. . . . The dismantled house and dooryard cluttered up with household gear, the people tramping out the dooryard grass. . . . To-night the barn would be empty of beasts and the house empty of folks. Only the wind would be moving on the hilltop, . . . unless a deserted cat would prowl in the darkness, and howl for the food that had never before been denied any living thing about this homestead."<sup>11</sup>

Games most popular at parties of rural youth about 1840 were *plumsack*, in which the beau was lightly chastised by his sweetheart, and Blind Man's Buff, in which "Love gropes with bandaged eyes." Other popular games were Drop-the-Handkerchief and Button! Button! Who's-Got-the-Button? The penalty for ineptness—often premeditated—in these and other games was a kiss. Coon hunts on frosty, moonlight nights in autumn were a pleasurable out-of-door pastime for youth of both sexes. Country boys and girls were not immune to the croquet craze which swept across America about 1870 or to the bicycle craze of the nineties, which was equally virulent. By far the most popular out-of-door diversion, however, especially with courting couples, was buggy and sleigh rides. Baseball began to establish itself as the national game about 1865. For a number of years it was wholly amateur; every school and rural village had its nine.

### MUSIC AND DANCING

Vocal and instrumental music have entered largely into the pattern of rural life. Prior to 1900, no family or public gathering, no church, school, or community entertainment would have been complete without group<sup>t</sup> singing of sacred music and folk songs. In the Allegheny Mountains, especially, many of the ballads, folk songs, nursery, and counting-out rhymes and legends of Scotland and England were kept alive from generation to generation by word of mouth; some of these



are being re-discovered in our day. Stephen Foster (1826-1864), who was born in Allegheny County, was the most beloved folk-song writer of America; his "Old Folks at Home," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Old Black Joe," "Old Dog Tray," and "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming" are as universal in their appeal as "Annie Laurie" and "Loch Lomond."

The country singing school of 1840 to 1890 was a notable community social event. A Westmoreland County farmer, John R. Steele, recalls his participation in one about 1880: "After the chores were done and we had lapped our supper of mush and milk, we dressed in our coarse, warm clothes and listened for the sound of bells; then we hastened to pile into the first neighbor's sled that was bound for the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse was packed from corner to corner. The whole neighborhood, old and young, was there. We always began by singing 'Greeting Glee.' It was followed by 'Over the Tide of That Jasper Sea,' 'They That Trust in the Lord,' 'Summer's Going,' 'Nearer Home,' 'Serenade,' 'Merry May,' and many others. . . . We always closed with 'Goodnight.' Then teams were unblanketed and we started home singing all the way. My brother and I went upstairs by the light of a grease lamp and tumbled into bed in a fireless room of the old log house."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps in their dreams they still heard the admonition of the singing master:

"Hear, my young friends, observe there are  
But two beats-measure to the bar."  
Again the tuning fork goes *ding!*  
"Now, all be careful: One, two,—sing!"

Sunday evening singing by Amish young people still is popular, especially with courting couples. Says Walter Kollmorgen, "Usually they go to a designated place where young people assemble to pair off. The village of Intercourse, centrally located in the large Old Order community, is the place. . . . By 8 o'clock most of them are again on the road, headed for the singing with their chosen partners. In the house of the host, they gather around a table to sing church hymns, '*einstimmig*.' Singing is often interspersed with riddles or conundrums. Refreshments are always served. Everyone is expected to leave for home before midnight."<sup>13</sup> In recent years singing schools and community singing have been almost wholly superseded by public school singing. During World War I (1917-1918) there was a brief revival of community singing, mostly of such haunting war-time melodies as "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "There's a Long, Long Trail a-Winding," and "Over There."

In 1931 and again in 1934, the State Potato Growers' Association sponsored a Rural Choir Contest at The Pennsylvania State College; this became part of the program of the annual Farmers' Day at the



College. The seventh such contest was held in 1939. Choruses of not fewer than eight voices represented Grange, Churches, and other community organizations. The finals of the fifth Grange Group Music Festival were held in 1940 at the annual meeting of the State Grange, following preliminary competition between subordinate and Pomona Granges.

Instrumental music has supplemented singing, especially in rural homes. A stringed musical instrument called the *zitter*, which somewhat resembles a zither, was popular among Pennsylvania Germans until about 1870; it was used to accompany hymn singing in the home. In 1888 it was reported, "In our own county [Lebanon] there are no less than nine hundred Miller organs, besides about four hundred pianos, . . . mostly through the county . . . There is not a village, however small, but on stated evenings they [boys] can be seen trodding along in all kinds of weather, walking for miles after a hard day's work, going to [band or orchestra] rehearsal . . . Two hundred of [the 300 members of the fifteen bands in the county] are the boys from the country."<sup>14</sup> The era of community brass bands and open-air band concerts on Saturday nights passed about 1910; thereafter band music in the country was mostly in connection with the public schools.

The Industrial Revolution radically changed the character of rural entertainment. With the passing of the singing school, frolics, and bees, folk songs that were hallowed by time began to lose favor, especially among young people, and "popular music" came into vogue. Before 1900 most of this had a thick vein of melodrama and sentimentality, as "The Picture That Is Turned Toward the Wall" (1891), "After the Ball Is Over" (1892), and "My Mother Was a Lady" (1896). Most of the popular songs and "hits" of these and later years had a brief rage and were soon forgotten, to be succeeded by others equally ephemeral. They were evidence of a sad deterioration in musical taste as compared with the days when songs that endure, as those by Stephen Foster, and sacred music, were known and sung by all.

About 1916, "jazz," which originally was negro music set to dance time, captured the popular fancy only to be succeeded by "swing" and other barbaric types of music which depend largely on their special rhythm for appeal. The advent of the phonograph and radio provided "canned music" and tended to check the personal expression of musical ability by amateurs; it was easier to listen to professionals.

Except among strict religious sects, dancing has been one of the most popular rural diversions. In the early days, dancing was mostly in the home or on the barn floor. Young people would gather late in the afternoon at some hospitable home; the boys would saw and split wood while the girls busied themselves in the house preparing supper. After supper, the living room was cleared and square danc-

ing ensued to the accompaniment of a fiddle, but often time was marked by clapping hands and stamping feet. The stentorian voice of the caller indicated the different figures:

Single style, Indian style,  
Stop and swing her once in a while.  
Off to the right with a dish rag wring,  
Then to the left with a bear hug swing.  
Now the oyster, now the clam,  
Dance that girl to fairyland.

Fiddlers were a jovial lot. They might have fortified themselves for the long ordeal with stimulants until they could hardly stick in their chairs. With great abandon they played "Turkey in the Straw," "Money Musk," "Virginia Reel," "Sourwood Mountain," "Cluck Old Hen," "Napoleon's March," "John Anderson," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "The Devil's Dream," "French Four," "Pine Creek Lady," and other rollicking tunes which set feet to dancing or to tapping the floor. During the winter, dances were commonly held on Saturday night. Always, at the stroke of twelve, "Home, Sweet Home" was played; no one would be so wicked as to dance on Sunday.

Soon after World War I, rural young people began to abandon other amusements and devote the entire evening to dancing. The waltz and other graceful round dances were largely superseded by the "Bunny Hug," "Turkey Trot," and other grotesque gyrations. Jazz spread with the new dances. The dance hall and road house began to invade the countryside. In 1918, *Pennsylvania Grange News* stated, "Dancing in Grange Halls or in connection with the Grange has been the leading cause of disrupting many Granges in Pennsylvania." In the early days of radio, barn dances by radio music were popular with rural young people who still enjoyed the old-fashioned square dances.

#### DRAMA AND MOVIES

The drama and musical comedy have contributed largely to rural entertainment, especially since 1900. After 1855, dramatic versions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and T. S. Arthur's "Ten Nights in a Barroom" toured the State. These two plays helped break down the prejudice of many deeply religious people against the drama. Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" also was a favorite. Some of the traveling shows that appeared in rural districts had very poor casts. In 1890 an editor of a country newspaper sourly commented, "An Uncle Tom's Cabin company gave a show here last night. The dogs were poorly supported." Gilbert and Sullivan's sparkling musical comedy entertained many a rural audience after 1880. After 1890, the black-face minstrel show, sparked by "Sambo" and "Bones," began to lose its appeal. It was succeeded for a brief period by variety shows and ultimately by the movies.

After 1920, the interest of rural people in amateur dramatics and pageants was intensified. In 1930 it was reported, "For years the community clubs and especially the Granges, of Chester County, Pennsylvania, have encouraged dramatics. . . . This last season, 1929-1930, twenty active player groups took part in a year-round county program."<sup>15</sup> In 1931-1932, forty-one counties had amateur dramatics teams which represented Granges, Literary Societies, Parent-Teachers' Associations, churches, and other rural organizations. Winners in county and district competition were entered in the State-wide contest held at the Farm Show. The Sixth Annual State Rural Music and Dramatic Tournament was held in 1936. The music groups included male quartets, stringed bands, women's glee clubs, orchestras, and mixed choruses. Forty-two counties were represented in the one-act play contest. After 1935, numerous county Rural Talent Festivals, which included one-act plays, music, folk games, and pageants, were held under the auspices of County Agricultural Extension Associations. Several hundred farm people participated in the annual pageant at the Farm Show.

With the opening of the twentieth century, three new types of entertainment—the movie, phonograph, and radio—began to supplement and eventually almost to supplant those that had prevailed hitherto, except dancing. In 1889, the kinetoscope was invented by Thomas A. Edison, and in 1896 the Edison Company presented the first silent moving picture in a theater. In 1908, moving picture theaters were common in cities, but there were few in rural towns until after 1910. By 1920, more than half the movie theaters in Pennsylvania were in towns of less than 5,000; only the most remote rural districts were without them. Mary Pickford became "America's Sweetheart" and Charles Chaplin made the nation rock with laughter at his slap-stick comedy.

Many of the older generation did not welcome this innovation. In 1914 the editor of *Pennsylvania Farmer* warned, "Moving picture shows are a menace to society. There is scarcely a country town that has not one or more of them. They are cheap—only five or ten cents a show. For young people the movies must be classed with cheap, trashy literature and even more dangerous allurements. The wise parent will place moving pictures as one of the most serious menaces to the proper development of the child." With the advent of sound movies and colored film, attendance mounted. By 1940 the movie had become the most popular amusement of rural young people, next to dancing, even though most of the films were concerned with sex, thrills, and glamorized urban life. On the other hand, moving pictures were used more and more by schools, churches, and other agencies as means of propaganda and education as well as entertainment.

The first "talking machine" was made by Thomas A. Edison in 1877. By 1910, Victor Talking Machines with huge loud speakers were found in many farm homes; their trademark was a dog listening to "His Master's Voice." Other commercial forms of this invention were known as phonographs or graphophones. By 1925, phonograph records had largely supplanted the fiddler for providing dance music. Dust began to gather on melodeons and pianos in many farm homes; they became only pieces of antique furniture.

"Wireless telegraphy" was patented on June 2, 1896, by Guglielmo Marconi of Italy. The first radio broadcasting station in the world was KDKA at Pittsburgh. On November 2, 1920, the Westinghouse Electrical and Manufacturing Company of that city began to broadcast programs daily. On August 6, 1921, *National Stockman and Farmer* announced, "This week we carry an advertisement which is the first of its kind ever to appear in an agricultural journal. The wireless telephone will some day be as common in farm homes as other modern conveniences are now." This prophecy has been abundantly fulfilled.

In 1923, wave lengths were assigned to different transmitting stations. In 1924, there were 10,378 receiving sets in Pennsylvania farm homes; many were home-made crystal sets which were sorely afflicted with static. In 1927 the number had increased to 34,000 and it was stated, "No invention in recent years, not even the automobile, has increased in popularity among farmers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania so rapidly as the radio."<sup>16</sup> By 1940, more than half of the farms had radio sets, some in barns as well as houses.

The popularity of radio among farmers was due as much to the entertainment that it provided for all the family as to its usefulness as a source of information on weather, markets, political happenings, and news of the world. In 1920, KDKA began to transmit musical programs; by 1925, a varied program of music, drama, comedy, and other entertainment was available to rural people throughout the day, together with adult educational and cultural features. This was made possible by "commercials," the advertisements of business firms that had tooth paste, cigarettes, motor fuel, patent medicines, and a multitude of other articles or services to sell; these were interspersed with the entertainment and educational program. The farmer could sit in his easy chair after supper and hear the news of the world and happenings at the nation's capital. His wife could listen to music and entertainment and to local news while doing her household tasks. His children could listen to their favorite programs of juvenile entertainment—which also advertised the merits of certain breakfast foods. The radio removed the barrier of space that had separated farm homes from the world at large. In 1940, television, in which the characters on the air could be seen as well as heard, was a decade away.



## PUBLIC OCCASIONS

The old-time Fourth of July was a red letter day for rural people. The Brookville *Backwoodsman* described the local celebration of 1843: "The glorious day was ushered in by the firing of cannons and the ringing of bells. At an early hour the Independent Greens marched through the streets to the cheers of the large body of spectators. . . . Following the parade the Declaration of Independence was read at The Court House in a clear and impressive tone after which David S. Deering, Esq., delivered an eloquent address appropriate to the occasion. . . . The company then formed into line and proceeded to the hotel where it sat down to a well-served, delicious and bountiful repast. The ladies formed a smiling and interesting platoon on one side of the table and added much to the hilarity of the occasion. After the cloth was removed a number of toasts applicable to the times, (fourteen, to be exact) were offered, accompanied by repeated cheering and a variety of airs from the brass band, thus passing the day in that union and harmony so characteristic of Americans."<sup>17</sup> Small boys had an estatic time with cap pistols, firecrackers, and other noise producers; at night rockets, Roman candles, and other pyrotechnic displays blazed across the sky.

The circus has charmed rural Pennsylvania for several generations. Until about 1860, small troupes traveled the dusty country roads of midsummer for one-night stands in rural towns. About 1855, "Barnum's Grand Colossal Museum and Menagerie" began to entrance multitudes: a steam calliope heralded the opening of "the greatest show on earth." In 1881 the two leading circus magnates, P. T. Barnum and J. A. Bailey, combined their shows into a spectacle that had no rival at that time. The superlatives of the English language and the fervid imagination of artists were exhausted in an attempt to portray on florid colored posters the glories of this event. The great elephant, Jumbo, was secured from the Royal Zoological Gardens, England; it was a lodestone that drew rural youth to the show.

Under the "Big Top," clowns, slap-stick artists, acrobats, and trained animals held the crowd spell-bound. Prodigious quantities of peanuts were consumed at five cents a bag.

From 1850 until 1880, balloon ascensions were an exciting event at county and state fairs. John Wise of Lancaster modestly described himself as "the world-renowned aeronaut who has made more voyages through the Heavens than any other man." Sometimes more than 20,000 people paid a dollar each to see his daring flights.

In addition to the Glorious Fourth and circus day, county fairs were outstanding rural holidays. Some communities had an annual Old Settlers' Day which was devoted to speeches extolling the good old days, horse shoe pitching, athletic contests, and fried chicken dinners.



Grange, church, and community picnics enlivened the summer months. One country editor wrote disparagingly of "the big picnic dinner that takes a day to prepare, a day to eat and a day to recover from. This back-breaking, stomach-wrecking institution belongs to the past when people could take a lot of punishment." He found himself in a hopeless minority. There was considerable fighting at fairs, dances, camp meetings, and other public occasions; men were prone to drink, and discussions of politics waxed hot.

Numerous contests of skill—athletics, turkey shoots, and the like—added zest to public occasions. Wagers were laid on the slightest provocation. The diary of Robert Cooper, a Venango County farmer, contained this item in 1853: "Dr. J. W. Orwig bet that he could suck forty-eight hen eggs at one time. I stood him five dollars. The doctor sucked the forty-eight eggs and won the money." Until about 1900, old fiddler contests were popular; the contestants were sixty to eighty years old. Competitive grain-reaping contests attracted great crowds; band music and refreshments, liquid and solid, enhanced the enjoyment of the contests in midsummer heat.

Neighborhood corn husking contests have been a popular rural diversion since colonial days. The second annual county-wide contest of York County was held October 31, 1935, under the auspices of the County Agricultural Extension Association. Husking was from shocked corn. *Pennsylvania Farmer* reported that there were sixty-five contestants and 1,500 spectators. At 10 A. M. each contestant husked for five minutes. The twenty best were entered in the finals which began at 1:00 P. M. and they husked for eighty minutes. Stanley Yeager was champion; he husked 22.34 bushels of seventy pounds each.<sup>18</sup>

The first unofficial State-wide corn husking contest from shocks was held at York, November 6, 1937.<sup>19</sup> The first official State-wide contest, which was sponsored by *Pennsylvania Farmer*, was held on October 26, 1938, in Lancaster County. The corn was husked from standing stalks under the rules of the National Corn Husking Contest. Prior to the State contest county contests were held. Several thousand men watched eighteen men battle for supremacy. The winner, a York County farmer, husked 25.16 bushels in eighty minutes. The winner of the 1940 State-wide contest husked 30.27 bushels from standing corn in eighty minutes before 7,000 spectators.

Horseshoe pitching or "barnyard golf" has been a favorite sport among Pennsylvania farmers for more than a century. In 1931 it was reported, "Nearly every county in the state will have a county-wide tournament this year. Preliminary to the county contest local contests are held at picnics, field days, fairs and other rural gatherings. Interest is running high and eager eyes are turned toward county

championships and the state championship." In 1938, John Fulton of Cumberland County won the State championship at the Farm Show; he pitched fifty-eight ringers out of 100 throws.

### COMMUNICATION

The isolation that characterized rural life before 1900 was largely removed by the telephone (1895), Rural Free Delivery (1900), automobile (1912), parcels post (1913), good roads (beginning about 1914), and the radio (1920). These obliterated the miles that formerly separated town from country; no longer are rural people set apart from the rest of the world. They brought evils as well as blessings into country life, but on the whole they have been salutary. In 1900 it was seriously proposed by one economist that the problem of rural isolation be met by gathering farmers into villages, as in Europe. This wildly impracticable scheme met the cool reception that it deserved.

Improvements in mail service have been an important factor in the betterment of rural life. In 1850, letter postage, which had been exorbitant, was reduced to three cents to all points less than 3,000 miles distant. In 1885 the rate became two cents an ounce to any point in the United States or Canada. This greatly stimulated rural letter writing. Most Amish, who do not marry outside the sect, have the same family names as the first immigrants of their faith from Europe, two centuries ago—Yoder, Zug, Lapp, Koenig, Beiler, Glick, Fischer, Blank, Erb, Kauffman, Schmucher, Petersheim, and Stoltzfus. There may be a dozen men named Joseph Stoltzfus on one mail route in an Amish community; hence there is much confusion in delivery of mail. To meet this problem some Amish have adopted nicknames; one is known as "Two-miles-from-White-Horse Henner Yoder."

In 1891 Postmaster-General John Wanamaker of Philadelphia recommended Rural Free Delivery of mail; but not until 1896 were the first trial routes established. The National Grange was active in securing passage of the enabling Act. In November, 1896, four experimental routes were established in Pennsylvania, two out of Lancaster, one out of Ruffsdale, Westmoreland County, and one out of New Stanton in the same county. The office of the Postmaster-General reported, "The rural carriers performed their services on horseback, or riding in buckboards, buggies, two-wheeled carts or on bicycles. . . . There has been . . . a hesitation on the part of the community to break in upon their long-established custom of riding to town for their mails."<sup>20</sup>

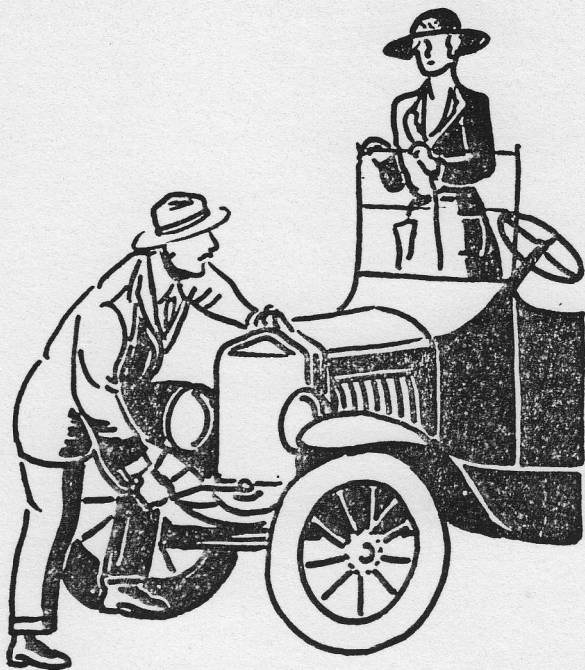
In some parts of the country farmers were opposed to RFD. In 1896 the United States Department of Agriculture stated: "The argument has been advanced by farmers themselves at Farmers' Institutes that it is out of the question to have a general free delivery in country districts. Farmers have not asked for this service nor do

they believe that it is practicable because of the expense involved."<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania farmers, however, warmly supported the movement. According to the Postmaster-General's office, "The service [in Lancaster County] was popular from the start and soon resulted in a large increase in the number of letters and newspapers carried. . . . Within a short time after the establishment of the service [in Westmoreland County] the number of pieces of mail carried was doubled."<sup>22</sup> The service was extended gradually throughout the State; by 1924 there were 2,036 routes covering an aggregate distance of 53,385 miles.

At first some rural mail carriers did business on the side; they were in effect, traveling business agents or peddlers. In 1904 the federal government increased their pay and stipulated that carriers should have no other vocation. Considerable opposition to RFD developed among local merchants whose business was hurt because of farmer trade with mail order houses. In 1926, RFD carriers who formerly had covered their routes in four or five hours with horse and buggy did so in one or two hours with an automobile. By 1940, RFD served practically every rural family. Among other benefits, it enabled farmers to take daily papers; on one route the number increased from thirteen to 113 in three years.

Parcels Post was inaugurated January 1, 1913, against the strenuous opposition of express companies and country storekeepers. The National Grange strongly supported the measure. In 1910 a Bradford County farmer said, "The means of communication of greatest importance to the farmer at the present time would be obtained by the establishment of the parcels post." The express companies and country merchants opposed it, he said, the latter on the ground that they could not compete with the great mail order houses of the cities. "Just so long as we permit corporate interests to dominate this question just so long will we do without this needed reform."<sup>23</sup> At first it was thought that Parcels Post would promote direct-to-consumer marketing of farm produce, but little of this developed. The chief advantage was cheaper buying from a larger selection of certain farm and household articles. After Parcels Post was established, mail-order catalogs were found in nearly all farm homes; they were the twentieth-century successor to the Yankee peddler of the nineteenth century.

Horse-and-buggy days ended for many farmers about 1912, when cheap and efficient automobiles became available. In his father's day, said a Lycoming County farmer, in 1900, "All rode on horseback. There were no wagons for pleasure; even in 1855 there were no covered wagons in the prosperous Lycoming Creek valley."<sup>24</sup> Soon thereafter horse-drawn vehicles—buggies, carriages, surreys, and buckboards—were the almost exclusive method of travel throughout the



*Cranking the "fiver," 1916*

State until displaced by the automobile about 1912. The Old Order Amish, however, still live in horse-and-buggy days. Traveling along modern concrete or macadam highways in their little top buggies—all built and most of them painted alike,—they are a picturesque anachronism, a glimpse of an era that has long since passed away. In this, as in many other respects, the Amish have remained singularly aloof from the mainstream of life.

Few farm youth were caught up in the bicycle craze of the 1890's. When automobiles first appeared on the highways, most rural people fought them as they would the devil in person. Some aroused farmers whose teams had been stampeded by the noisy contraptions urged the use of pitchforks to keep the country roads clear of them. In 1903 the General Assembly set the speed limit at twenty miles an hour, and the driver was required to stop his car and pull to the side of the road when signalled by the driver of a horse-drawn vehicle.

Not until after 1910 did automobiles begin to commend themselves to farmers to any considerable extent. In 1914, only seven per cent of Pennsylvania farmers owned automobiles; in 1921, the percentage had risen to seventy-two. By 1940, practically every farmer had at least one car.



The automobile revolutionized country life. It enabled the farmer to trade at points twenty-five or more miles away, thus causing the country store, once a business and social center of great significance, to languish. It enabled him to mingle freely with people in near-by towns and cities, to send his children to consolidated schools, and to make vacation trips to distant points. It was a potent social as well as economic force in rural life. Henry Ford's famous Model T, a cheap but serviceable little car, was preeminently the farmers' automobile; for years more were sold than all other cars combined. Although the butt of a thousand jokes, the "flivver" or "tin Lizzie" made history. It contributed more to the transformation of country life than any other single factor. It was taken out of production in 1927.

Alexander Graham Bell first exhibited his telephone at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876, but the public did not take it seriously for many years thereafter. Western Union dubbed it a "scientific toy." Until after 1890, the telephone was a convenience of the city; its cost to the farmer was prohibitive. There were, however, a few short private lines in the country. In 1883, a Susquehanna County farmer reported, "One of my neighbors, who lives distant one half mile, and myself, have made telephone connection between our houses. We use small copper wire, with the simple telephone, using no electricity. The cost to us was less than five dollars. With it we can converse at nearly all times."<sup>25</sup>

After 1893, when the monopoly of the Bell Telephone Company expired, independent mutual lines were built by farmers. For many years the Bell Telephone Company refused to connect with independent lines; this only contributed to their growth. One of the largest farmers' mutual telephone companies in the United States was that at Canonsburg; in 1905 it served 1,030 farms. In 1910, a Bradford County farmer told of the growth of a local cooperative telephone line: "Farmers were allowed to furnish poles or work in part payment for their stock, and no man was allowed to own more than three shares of stock . . . At the present time this company [has] 1,200 stockholders, with half as many renters, and owns about 2,000 miles of wire. There is scarcely a farm in the region but can be reached by 'phone. The expense . . ., to stockholders owning their own 'phones, is \$4.00 a year."<sup>26</sup>

The telephone was a major means of alleviating the isolation of country life. There was some friction at first because curiosity led many farm people to listen to the conversation of others on the same line. There was much visiting on the telephone among neighbors, especially women. In time of emergency the telephone was especially useful. Weather predictions and market reports were sent out over the telephone before the radio was available. It facilitated business transactions. By 1940, about half of Pennsylvania farm homes had telephones.

Old Order Amish did not permit them to be installed in their homes because they are "worldly" and "tempt the women to waste their time talking to their neighbors." Pay telephone stations, however, were located throughout Amish communities.

The epic flight of Charles Lindbergh across the Atlantic from New York to Paris in 1927 was dramatic evidence that the air age had begun. By 1940, aviation was an established commercial industry but had not yet entered largely into country life, although there were a few "flying farmers," pioneers in what may become a common mode of transportation in the future.

Easier and cheaper transportation and increasing agricultural prosperity made it possible for farmers and their families to take more vacation trips. Before 1840, few farmers traveled beyond the boundaries of their own county; by 1940, there were few who had not visited some distant points of interest, perhaps several thousand miles away. Between 1850 and 1910, travel was mostly by rail, with brass-studded horse-hide trunks handed down from stage coach days. A honeymoon at Niagara Falls was the fond dream of every prospective bride and groom; they were thrilled when the "Maid of the Mist" carried them to the very vortex of the Falls. Many Pennsylvania farmers traveled by rail to the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876 and to the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1892, where the white splendor of the "Court of Honor," with its splashing fountains and lagoons of placid water, was a dream of loveliness. After 1912, farm-family vacation trips were mostly by automobile; "tin can tourists" sleeping in tents attached to the car were a common sight in national parks three thousand miles away. By 1918, family and group automobile tours were common; they helped to broaden the horizon of rural people.

### THE CHANGING RURAL SCENE

It was inevitable that as the country became more and more urbanized some of the disadvantages as well as the benefits of urban life should creep in. Most farmers observe Sunday in accord with the spiritual injunction. In 1933, against practically united opposition from rural districts, the Blue Laws of the State were amended for the first time since they were passed in 1794; commercial baseball and football games were permitted in districts which voted in favor of this action at a regular election. This was the opening wedge; Sunday movies, golf, and other diversions followed. The lax Sunday of continental Europe began to prevail to a considerable extent in rural as well as urban America.

By Act of General Assembly in 1905, the Pennsylvania State Constabulary or State Police was organized, primarily to maintain law and order in rural districts. In 1923, the State Highway Patrol was com-

bined with it. The service rendered by the State Police has been outstanding; it has greatly added to the security of rural life. In 1940 there were 1,408 State Police stationed at 117 points; practically all counties had at least one. They covered a certain territory on a regular schedule and were available on call in time of emergency.

After 1870, the great natural beauty of the Pennsylvania countryside began to be marred by commercial advertising, especially billboards and signs painted on farm buildings. Much of the abatement of this objectionable feature is in the hands of farmers on whose property many of the signs are placed. The paltry recompense that they receive from the advertising agency is insignificant as compared with the beauty that is destroyed. Efforts to persuade the General Assembly to prohibit or regulate this nuisance, as is done in several other states, have thus far been without avail. Ogden Nash's paraphrase of the immortal poem of Joyce Kilmer contains more truth than poetry:

I think that I shall never see  
A billboard lovely as a tree.  
Indeed, unless the billboards fall  
I'll never see a tree at all.

In recent years the State Department of Highways has adorned many miles of roadside with shrubbery, flowers, and small flowering trees. An Act of General Assembly of 1879 provided: "Any person liable to road tax, who shall transplant to the side of the public highway, on his own premises, any fruit, shade trees or forest trees, of suitable size, shall be allowed . . . in abatement of his road tax, one dollar for every four trees set out."<sup>27</sup> After 1900, the planting of shade trees along rural highways was discontinued because they interfere with telephone and electric service, rob crops in adjacent fields, and tend to keep the road in poor condition, especially in winter.

The constantly increasing number of contacts between country and town people in churches, schools, service clubs, and other community activities has tended to develop a spirit of unity. In 1824 it was reported, "During the summer the business men of Lock Haven and the farmers of Clinton County visit various types of farms throughout the County and then have a corn roast and picnic supper together. During the winter the townmen act as hosts to the farmers who visit the largest centers of business in the city. The result has been a closer acquaintance and deeper confidence between the two groups." In the same year: "Before 12,000 people attending the annual Susquehanna Valley Farmers' Picnic at Sunbury, August 13, 1924, twenty-four farmers upheld the reputation of rural people as expert horseshoe pitchers by defeating twenty-four business men. The score was 604 to 293." Business men in many urban service clubs take an active interest in, and often extend financial aid to, the Agricultural Extension program, especially the club work of rural boys and girls.

As a whole, country life is much more attractive than it was a generation ago; but some of the admirable features of rural life in former years have been lost. This is especially true in districts that have been "blighted" by urban or industrial development. According to William V. Dennis, "The increased mobility of the farm population has been both a benefit and a misfortune, oftentimes weakening the social structure of the community, while it broadens the horizons of the individual farmers."<sup>28</sup>

In 1929, a Venango County farmer, O. C. Sigworth, spoke eloquently of the degeneration of rural life in certain parts of that county resulting from the invasion of industry: "Our township," he wrote, "is strictly a rural community, six to twelve miles from Franklin and fifteen from Oil City. Twenty years ago . . . we had a going Grange of 150 members. There were six churches of four denominations and nine schools.

"Our social activities were somewhat crude—we had log-rollings, stone haulings, wood choppings. The Grange Hall was a center for dancing, festivals, entertainments, etc. Our young people piled in sleds and with bells jingling, what a merry ride to some neighbor's for a party, a taffy-pull or play, and we fathers and mothers could shake a leg or play 'The Bear Went Over the Mountains' with the best of them. We had spelling bees, Lyceums, oyster suppers, etc., attended by everybody from six months old to octogenarians.

"We lived mostly from the products of our farms. She was a poor housewife who did not have enough fruits, jellies, and preserves, etc., to open a can every day of the dormant season and the odor of bread baking and apple butter boiling was abroad in the land.

". . . But prosperity struck us a solar plexus blow. Franklin woke from a sleepy county seat . . . to a first-rate industrial center . . . Oil City became the center of Standard Oil activities . . . Our boys left the farms and flocked to the cities . . .

"Our Grange is innocuous desuetude. Our churches, except one, are pastorless . . . Our social activities are nil . . .

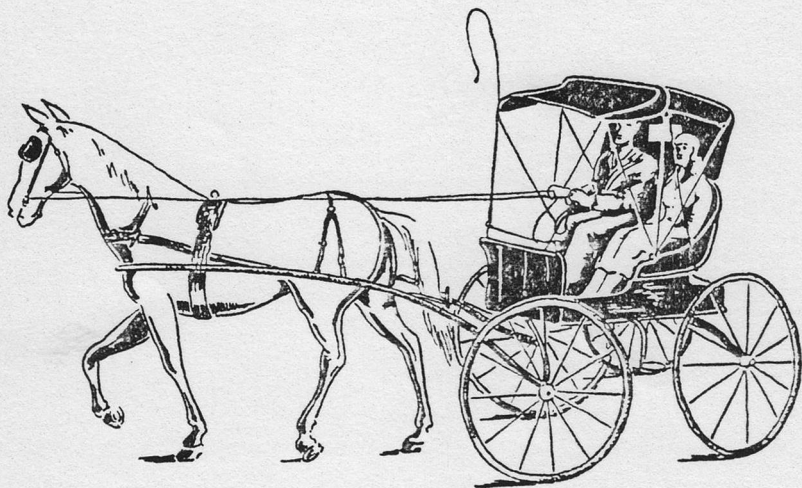
". . . The housewife buys bread and canned goods at the grocery and motors to the movies. The husband migrates back and forth to the shop. The family keeps a pig, a cow and some hens and raises a few spuds . . . Our small hill-side farms will be no more profitable."<sup>29</sup> This gloomy picture is representative of many other parts of the State where industry has blighted agriculture.

In every generation there are those who sigh for "the good old days" of their youth. In 1855, a Chester County farmer called up nostalgic memories of his boyhood: "Old implements and old customs have been superseded . . . The reapers are not often seen in animated contest gathering the grain in their bosoms. The sound of lusty threshers is rarely noticed beating time upon the hardened ground. The huskers' jolly party of men and damsels are no more heard singing by the moon-



light as they strip the yellow corn.—The apple-paring matches and the quilters' pleasant frolics have ceased to cheer the big old fire-place with the jovial airs of the fiddle and the fantastic footsteps of the jig . . . The spinning wheel is seldom whirling its industrious round. The flax pullers no longer ply their merry task—gone are the days of the cocked hat, the buckled small clothes, the ruffled wristbands and the fair topped boots."<sup>30</sup>

Thus does the old give place to the new in every generation, and the new seldom seems good to those who experienced the old in their youth. But no one can turn back the pages of time.



*Rural courting couple, 1890*